



ועידת התביעות  
Claims Conference  
Conference on Jewish Material Claims  
Against Germany

## **Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection**

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## Memories of William Blye (formerly Wolf Bleiweiss)

I was born in LEIPZIG (Germany) on April 7, 1924. My father, Chaim Bleiweiss was born on January 14, 1894 in LUBLIN, which, before WW1 was Russia, after 1918 it became Polish.. My mother, Maria Lustgarten, was born on Oct. 21, 1896 in Tarnow (Poland). They married on Feb. 1919 in Warsaw, where they lived at that time. On Dec. 1919 a girl was born, my sister. She died approx. 3 years later. On the way to the cemetery, my parents who were heartbroken to lose their first born, heard a couple in the street shouting: "Another Jew Less.". My parents decided then and there that they could not live in this country. They went to Leipzig (Germany) sometime in 1922. My father worked for a furrier and in a couple of years later started his own business. He exported and imported furs and also manufactured fur coats. He became successful and bought a house in a suburb of Leipzig, by the name of Naunhof. My two brothers were born there

Bernhard in June 1923

Leo in May 1925

and me Wolf (William) in Apr. 1924 ----- In 1929, when the Stock market crash occurred, and the depression started, my father lost the house and we moved into a beautiful 7 room apartment in Leipzig. In 1931 I went to the Volksschule (Elementary).

When Hitler came to power in 1933, many things changed. Words like "Schmutziger Jude, Schweine Jude etc." were not strange to any of us. One incident still sticks in my mind. One day my mother sent me to the store to get some milk. In those days milk was dispensed into a pot. While walking home,





I was surrounded by some kids from my school. They called me Schweine Jude, grabbed the pot and laughing, poured the milk over my head. I remember asking my mother what Schweine Jude meant. She did not answer. I had a teacher, who had a bamboo cane with him at all times. His first name was "Horst". He must have known that I was Jewish, because for the smallest infraction he called me up front, made me bend over and hit me. One day he hit me for so long and hard, that when I came home, my mother saw welts all over my back. Except for these incidents we had a very comfortable life. Of course no one anticipated or wanted to believe what actually was going to happen. My father always said that nothing savage can happen in a country that has produced a Mozart or a Beethoven. My mother had opposite thoughts. She insisted we should leave.

Ever so often new anti-Semitic laws came from Nurnberg. One was that Jewish children could not go to German schools. The Jewish community in Leipzig created their own school, which was called "Karlebach Schule". Soon the quality of this school became such, that parents of non Jewish children sent them to this school, which accepted them.

Life soon became unbearable. Non Jewish stores had signs in the window: "Fur Juden verboten". (Forbidden to Jews). During the Christmas season, department stores had toys and running electric trains in the window. I was 10 years old and I had to see these toys and trains inside this department store. The sign said: "Fur Juden verboten". I was scared, but I went in. I expected to be arrested any minute. When I left, I remember, I was sweating.

Two weeks before my Barmitzwa, it was the beginning of March 1937, my father with 3 other business friends, were forced to march in the street carrying a placard saying: "Kauft nicht bei Juden, kauft nur in deutschen





Geschaften", (Don't buy from Jews, buy only in German stores), with some brown shirts carrying rubber truncheons behind. I still have a photograph of this incident. My father had a non Jewish friend, who told him that he could not talk politics, especially anything against the regime, in his own house, because his son, who belonged to the Hitler Jugend, would report him.

After my Barmitzwa, on April 1937, we closed the doors of our apartment, leaving everything behind, including my father's fur business. We even left the dishes on the table, so it would look that we would be coming back. We took a make believe vacation to Italy. My father listened one day to Italy's dictator Mussolini. Among other things he said: "In our country, all religions and races will be welcome and able to work and prosper." We settled in Milano. My father started a new fur business and without knowing the language, become successful. My two brothers and I, went to school there until 1939, when Mussolini became an Ally of Hitler. He expelled all the Jews that came to Italy after 1914. The native born Jews were temporarily left alone. A film was made in Italy about this period that describes the case of a wealthy Jewish Italian family, who thought that they were untouchable: "I Giardini dei Finzi Contini".

There was no country in the world, who wanted to admit us. So we had a plan. We went to the border of France with many of our friends. I do not remember the name of this mountain village. We hired a guide to smuggle us over the alps into France. After a day and night climbing, with no roads to speak of, the guide abandoned us in the middle of the night. By daybreak we found out that we crossed the border into France. We were all caught by the french border guards, who marched us to an outpost and arrested us. Those with some money, were given a six months permit to reside in France. The







others ended for a few days in confinement and then released. We ended up in Nice on the Cote d'Azur. We lived there for approx. 2 and a half years and used their school system. I graduated High School in the summer of 1942. As a graduating gift, my father sent me skiing in the Haute Savoie, in a village called Pralognan-La-Vannoise, near the Swiss border. While I was up there, 7 french gendarmes and a German in civilian clothes, came to our apartment. My mother and my 2 brothers were there. They were banging on the door, but my mother ignored them. They left. The concierge downstairs said that they were in, because he just collected their garbage. They came back. Broke the door down, ransacked the whole place and arrested my 2 brothers and my mother. My mother pleaded with one gendarme, saying that she was sick and needed an operation. As my brothers (19 and 17 years old) were taken to a collection are, where they were kept for about a week, before being shipped to Drancy, near Paris, my mother was taken to a Hospital, where she had herself operated by a sympathetic doctor, on a Hernia, which she did not need. My father, who was interned in a French concentration camp, Camp Gurs, was just freed. On his way back to Nice, he found out about the arrest of his 2 sons. He got hold of all the money and valuables he possessed at that time. He went to where my brothers were held and tried to buy them out. He knew the odds were stacked against him. He idolized his kids. He lost his head completely. They also arrested him, took his money. According to Serge Klarsfeld, the French lawyer, who documented the history, dates, etc. of the Jews deported from France, they were shipped with convoy no.27 on Sept.2,1942 to Drancy and then directly to Auschwitz. Before my father gave himself up, he wrote me a letter, explaining what happened. He wrote me not to come back - to hide. He would try to free my brothers and if he is





unsuccessful, he would go with them. He wrote to me that they don't know anything about the Germans and that he would help them, while working in Germany and s.G.w., come back. I was stranded up in this Hotel with no money and nowhere to go. The owner of this Hotel, a young widow, by the name of Mme Guttin, offered to help me. Well, she was a young widow and I was a young man. That solved my immediate problem. She took me to some friends of hers in Grenoble and hid me for a while there. My mother, in the meantime, was recuperating from her operation. She was still guarded by a French cop, waiting for the wounds to heal and then to be deported. With the help of Mme.Guttin, I went to the Hospital in Nice. I saw my mother sitting on a bench in the Hospital garden with the cop nearby. I showed myself to my mother and signaled her to take a casual walk towards me. She did so. I ran with her to a horse drawn carriage, (taxis at that time) and took off.-

The Italian occupation forces created a concentration camp to help the Jewish refugees. This camp was located way up in the mountains, near the Italian border in a village called St.Martin-Vesubie. We went there. There were about 800 refugees there, all of different nationalities.

On Sept.1943, the Italian army collapsed.. The commandant of this camp announced that we were free to go. He said that as the Germans were going to occupy all of France, they were going over the alps into Italy. We decided to follow them. By the time we reached a very mountainous area in Italy, near a town called Cuneo, we joined with several thousand soldiers. They formed many little groups of partisans. My group consisted of 23 men and 7 Jews, incl. my mother. One day, I went down to a village called Borgo San Dalmazzo. I was caught by a bunch of "Camicie neri" (Black shirts. The Italian fascists, that did not surrender) and put in a prison camp there. This





fateful day was Sept.13,1943 - There were about 350 Jews there. On Nov.1943, everybody was deported to Auschwitz. I managed to escape with two others about 2 weeks before and rejoined my group in the mountain. It was a very difficult and hard 17 months. Our officer was a man, who only wanted to survive the war. Several times, the Germans came up the mountains to hunt us down. The worst day was April 20,1944 (Hitler's birthday). I remember this was a sunny day. Not a cloud in the sky. It was very cold and the sun was brilliant. It was a beautiful day. But not for long. Soon we heard shouting: "I tedeschi vengono". The Germans are coming). As many other groups did some sabotages, the Germans came up the mountains with a vengeance, guns blazing, shooting at anybody, who was a male, whether young or old. We lost more than half of our group. I assumed, hopefully, that some must have joined other group. I never saw any of them again. Through all this difficult period, my mother held out pretty well.

On Feb.1945, the Germans retreated from this area towards Germany. 2 young soldiers deserted and came to our group. They were my age. One was a German and the other one was an Austrian. I became very friendly with them. They were often interrogated, and I became their translator. One always told jokes and the other was an acrobat, doing all kinds of tricks. The Austrian always talked about his mother. I got very attached to them. At that time , I did not know anything about gas chambers. A week after the Germans left the area, our officer handed me a pistol and told me to take them into the woods and shoot them. I could not and would not do it. He assumed that a Jew hates the Germans enough to kill them. Well he gave the pistol to one of his men, who took them into the woods. I heard two gunshots. The man came back like nothing happened.





Three of the seven Jews in our group survived, including my mother. Bullets flew by me so often, but fate was on my side. I returned to Nice and spent a few months looking for survivors. Nobody in my family made it. I come from a very large family. Uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, etc. etc. None survived. On Sep. 1946, I was contacted by a young man from Palestine. He was going to get me into Palestine. He said that the country needed young men, because, he said that a Jewish State will come into being and that we had to defend ourselves against the Arabs. Soon after this visit I received a letter through the Red Cross, from an uncle (My mother's brother), who lived in New York. I made the decision to come to this country. I met and married my wife on Feb. 1950, who also lost her entire family. We have three wonderful children and five grandchildren. My mother lived long enough to have "Naches" from my children, but not the grandchildren.---

If it weren't for the Italian people, who put their lives on the line to save so many of us, I would not be alive today. ---- I will never forget them!

